The Gentleman From Pennsylvania
BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1791 near Mercersburg, PA, the life of James Buchanan is the story of a man who declined to he a dictator He was a relentless foe of fanatics and demagogues; a man who held that reason and restraint were the essential tools of self-government. On these points he was inflexible and dogmatic, characteristics that would contribute to a failed Presidency.

His nearly 50 years of Public service began in 1814 in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. In 1820 he was elected to the United States House of Representatives where he served until 1831. That year Andrew Jackson appointed him minister to Russia.

After two years there he returned to the US and was elected to the Senate serving from 1834-1845. James Polk named Buchanan Secretary of State in 1845 where he served through the Polk administration.

He was a serious contender for the 1852 Presidential nomination, but lost to Franklin Pierce. Pierce then named him minister to England. His service in England helped bring him the Democratic nomination in 1856 because he was not a part of the bitter domestic disputes revolving around the expansion of slavery in the Kansas and Nebraska territories.

After his election as fifteenth President, the Kansas-Nebraska issue continued. Section controversy grew more serious during the last half of his administration. John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 intensified public feelings on both sides.

The election of Lincoln prompted secession by seven states during the final months of Buchanan's term. Dismayed and hesitant, Buchanan denied the legal right of states to secede, but held that the Federal Government could not legally prevent them. He hoped for compromise, but secessionist leaders would have none of it. Shortly after he left office, gunfire began the war at Fort Sumter.

He retired to Wheatland, outside of Lancaster. He fully supported the Union cause and President Lincoln. In June of 1868, he died.

As President, he was a rational, logical man well prepared for the Presidency, in a time that was both emotional and irrational. Buchanan was not able to overcome the conflict of the man and the times.